

Testimony in support of HB 7174 from Rebecca Vitale, MD, MPH

I am writing to you today in support of HB 7174, An Act Concerning Prescription Drugs. As a physician, I have seen the impact of skyrocketing prescription drug prices on my patients, but I am also a person living with chronic illness myself and have experienced the impact firsthand. I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes at age 6. People with type 1 diabetes cannot survive without insulin, and poor glucose management can lead to long-term complications and death. In the 24 years since I was diagnosed, the price of a vial of insulin has increased from \$25 to more than \$300, with no significant increase in the cost of production. Though pharmaceutical companies claim that patients never actually pay these prices, because of negotiations with insurance companies, people who are uninsured or who have high deductibles must pay the cost. There are many cases in the last few years of young adults with type 1 diabetes dying because they ran out of or tried to ration their insulin, because it was too expensive.

The problem is not just with insulin. With the highly-publicized increase in prices of EpiPens several years ago, the family of a 16 year old patient of mine was unable to pay the increased copay. She had had a life-threatening anaphylactic reaction to peanuts as a young child, and the EpiPens that she kept at home and school to treat such a reaction had expired. Because they were unable to afford the copay, her family had to hope that the expired EpiPens might still be effective in case of an emergency.

In a recent poll, 20% of patients said that they had cut a pill in half or skipped a dose of medication because they could not afford it. HB 7174 is a great step in this process, as the state employee health plan can negotiate lower prices. I support the fight against "pay-for-delay" tactics, in which pharmaceutical companies try to keep generics from entering the market. To expand the number of people that it helps, I support the creation of a prescription discount program that allows uninsured or underinsured individuals to pay out of pocket at this negotiated price, rather than having to pay full price.

With minimal regulation of the pharmaceutical industry's increases in drug prices, the stories like the ones I highlighted will continue to occur. As a physician and as a constituent, I support the passage of HB 7174 and the addition of a prescription discount program, as above, to help more of Connecticut's citizens afford their medications.